

Rohypnol and GHB

Rohypnol and GHB are predominantly central nervous system depressants. Because they are often colorless, tasteless, and odorless, they can be added to beverages and ingested unknowingly.

These substances emerged a few years ago as "drug-assisted assault" drugs.* Because of concern about their abuse, Congress passed the "Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996" in October 1996. This legislation increased Federal penalties for use of any controlled substance to aid in sexual assault.

Rohypnol —————

Rohypnol, a trade name for flunitrazepam, belongs to a class of drugs known as benzodiazepines. Rohypnol can incapacitate victims and prevent them from resisting sexual assault. It can produce "anterograde amnesia," which means individuals may not remember events they experienced while under the effects of the drug. Also, Rohypnol may be lethal when mixed with alcohol and/or other depressants.

Rohypnol is not approved for use in the United States, and its importation is banned. Illicit use of Rohypnol started

appearing in the United States in the early 1990s, where it became known as "rophies," "roofies," "roach," and "rope."

Abuse of two other similar drugs appears to have replaced Rohypnol abuse in some regions of the country. These are clonazepam, marketed in the U.S. as Klonopin and in Mexico as Rivotril, and alprazolam, marketed as Xanax. Rohypnol, however, continues to be a problem among treatment admissions in Texas along the Mexican border.

GHB —————

Since about 1990, GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) has been abused in the U.S. for its euphoric, sedative, and anabolic (body building) effects. It is a central nervous system depressant that was widely available over-the-counter in health food stores during the 1980s and until 1992. It was purchased largely by body builders to aid in fat reduction and muscle building. Street names include "liquid ecstasy," "soap," "easy lay," "vita-G," and "Georgia home boy."

Coma and seizures can occur following abuse of GHB. Combining use with other drugs such as alcohol can result in nausea and breathing difficulties. GHB may

also produce withdrawal effects, including insomnia, anxiety, tremors, and sweating. GHB and two of its precursors, gamma butyrolactone (GBL) and 1,4 butanediol (BD) have been involved in poisonings, overdoses, date rapes, and deaths.

Extent of Use —————

According to the 2004 Monitoring the Future** (MTF) survey, NIDA's annual survey of drug use among the Nation's high school students, 0.6 percent of 8th-graders, 0.7 percent of 10th-graders, and 1.6 percent of 12th-graders reported annual*** use of Rohypnol.

Annual use of GHB among 8th-graders and 12th-graders remained relatively stable from 2003 to 2004, but 10th-graders reported a significant decrease according

to MTF findings. In 2004, 0.7 percent of 8th-graders, 0.8 percent of 10th-graders, and 2.0 percent of 12th-graders reported annual use.

Hospital emergency department (ED) episodes involving GHB rose from 56 in 1994 to 4,969 in 2000, then declined in 2002 to 3,330. Among ED mentions involving club drugs, however, only MDMA (ecstasy) is cited more frequently than GHB.****

Other Information Sources —————

For additional information on Rohypnol and GHB, please also see the NIDA *InfoFacts* on Club Drugs and visit www.clubdrugs.org.

* Also known as "date rape," "drug rape," or "acquaintance rape."

** These data are from the 2004 Monitoring the Future survey, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, DHHS, and conducted annually by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The survey has tracked 12th-graders' illicit drug use and related attitudes since 1975; in 1991, 8th- and 10th-graders were added to the study. The latest data are online at www.drugabuse.gov.

*** "Lifetime" refers to use at least once during a respondent's lifetime. "Annual" refers to use at least once during the year preceding an individual's response to the survey. "30-day" refers to use at least once during the 30 days preceding an individual's response to the survey.

**** Emergency department data are from the annual Drug Abuse Warning Network, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, DHHS. The survey provides information about emergency department visits that are induced by or related to the use of an illicit drug or the nonmedical use of a legal drug. The latest annual data are available at 1-800-729-6686 or online at www.samhsa.gov.

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